

Longitudinal Pathways to Tobacco Use Among African-American and Puerto Rican Adolescents

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Studies of tobacco use and ethnicity have focused mainly on the prevalence of tobacco use. Fewer investigators have examined longitudinally the predictors of tobacco use among various ethnic groups. Personality, family, and peer risk factors for adolescent drug use have been identified in different ethnic groups using cross-sectional designs. In addition, investigators have found that certain risk factors are unique to particular ethnic groups. However, the interrelation of the domains of personality, family, and peer risk factors among African-American and Puerto Rican adolescents, using a longitudinal design, has not received sufficient attention.

This study focuses on two generally accepted tobacco-prone personality attributes during adolescence: unconventionality (i.e., tolerance of deviance/risk-taking behavior, low achievement, rebellion, deviance) and intrapsychic functioning (i.e., ego integration). This study investigates the differential risk factors and causal pathways to tobacco use in Puerto Rican and African-American adolescents. The second aim of this study is to examine aspects of the ethnic minority experience domain as moderators of familial risk and protective factors. Hierarchical regression analyses identified a model with direct and indirect paths to tobacco use. Family, personality, peer, and early smoking domains were directly related to later adolescent smoking. Risk-protective and protective-protective interactions between variables from the ethnic minority experience and family domains were identified. Interventions to reduce smoking among youths should focus on multiple contexts, including aspects of the ethnic minority experience.